



ESSEX COUNTY TRAIL ASSOCIATION

Preserve, Maintain, Respect

Vol. 28 No. 1 Spring/Summer 2010

Chairman's report

Susie Banta

Staying connected.

In November, 2009, ECTA held its first "Open Board of Director's Meeting". We did this because those of us in the thick of our busy transition year realized that our members and loyal supporters couldn't know all that was happening. We had lots to tell everyone, the meeting was very well received and will now be a regular feature of our calendar. Communication remains a top priority as we tackle more projects and work to expand our membership and supporter base. The months between November and March are usually pretty quiet with not much to tell. Not so this year....

The weather has been front and center on our radar screen for most of the winter. In January, we prayed for snow to blanket our trails for the first ever Myopia Sled Dog Races. We were rewarded with one of the most fun, best attended outdoor events on the North Shore...read all about it. That is the good news.

As Alex mentions in his Director's Report, the weather turned against us in February and March, creating a spring trail clean-up nightmare. The trail clean-up will be major and the cost significant. We have much we want to accomplish this year, but first the trails must be cleared of Mother Nature's mess. We hope you will consider joining us in person for a volunteer trail clean-up day (go to our website ectaonline.org for dates and details) and, if you can, respond to our Spring Annual Appeal letter with a donation above your membership dues.

Continued on page 2



Trees knocked down during the violent wind storm block the Pingree trail, a familiar scene on most trails in the ECTA network.

From the Director

Alex Van Alen

Storms bring the trail community outside.

Trees down across the trails in West Newbury, Appleton Farms and Pingree Reservation. Water up and over my knee-high boots in Biolabs. Bradley Palmer is a mess. These are just some of the stories coming in after a massive windstorm February 25 followed by a monsoon like Nor'Easter shortly thereafter.

We have mobilized our Trail Stewards to assess the damage, and working with our contractors, volunteers, landowners and partner organizations (The Trustees of Reservations, Greenbelt, Bradley Palmer/DCR) we are assuring that the trail system will be up and open in quick fashion. Already, and the water has hardly receded, we have

cleared all of the damage in Biolabs, a volunteer crew has been clearing the trails in West Newbury, the crew at Bradley Palmer is working hard on those trails, and we are responding to a stream of reports from all of our towns.

It is because of the enormous support that our members and volunteers give, that the ECTA is ready and able to keep this vast network of trails safe and passable. It is not hard to imagine, that without this incredible community's efforts, these trails would be lost to development or abandoned from negligence. Your Board, Carol, Pam and I feel grateful everyday that we have the opportunity to work in such a great place for such a great cause. As the trails dry out, we hope to see you out there.

ECTA Board of Directors

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Newsletter

Pamela Mansfield-Loomis

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Chairman's Report (cont'd.)

I also hope you will consider joining us for our ECTA Annual Meeting on Tuesday, April 13, at the Gould Barn in Topsfield. We will review our 2009 accomplishments and tell you about the work and the events we are planning for this year. Details accompany the Spring Annual Appeal letter or go to our website, ectaonline.org.

And speaking of ECTA events, we are beginning another new tradition this year. In May we will hold a cocktail party at the home of Susanna and Moose Colloredo-Mansfeld to honor and thank our President's Fund donors. Without the generous financial support of our "trail believers" we simply wouldn't be here. And, although the President's Fund is closed -- with a gratifying total of over \$100,000 -- our fundraising continues each year and we intend for our Fundraising Appreciation Party to become a fun annual event.

As always, our thanks go out to our staff, our many wonderful and dedicated volunteers, and our generous donors for your time, talent and commitment.

It is our goal to keep you in the loop and on the trails!

ECTA Lecture on Beaver Management

On February 25, at the Ipswich Town Hall, ECTA hosted Skip Lisle, president of Beaver Deceivers International, to discuss the management of beavers to balance protection of the built environment and wildlife habitat. Skip's presentation touched on wetland ecology, beaver habitat, and a detailed description of the evolution of Beaver Deceivers. These are Skip's creations that allow beavers to remain in their habitat, creating important wildlife habitat and ecological services, while protecting roads, bridges and even homes. We thank Skip for shedding light on this amazing creature, whose proper management is as complex as the habitat it creates. This talk was sponsored through a grant from the New England Biolabs Foundation.



Upcoming Events

April 10 ECTA at Hamilton-Wenham Green Fair

April 13 ECTA Annual Meeting

April 17 Family Vernal Pond Walk

April 24 ECTA Equine EXPO

April 25 Park Serve Day at Bradley Palmer

June 5 National Trails Day at Bradley Palmer

Visit the ECTA website at www.ectaonline.org for details and for the latest updates. Do you receive emailed updates from ECTA? If not, please be sure we have your current email address. Contact Alex@[ectaonline.org](mailto:alex@ectaonline.org) to connect with us.

ECTA Partners with Topsfield Linear Common

by Joe Geller, ECTA Trail Steward
and Chairman, Topsfield Rail Trail
Committee

There is an abandoned rail bed that once started in Wakefield and ended in Newburyport and it goes right through Topsfield. The towns along the rail bed are all working towards converting it into a 40-mile long recreational path. In Topsfield our 4 miles are called the TLC, or Topsfield Linear Common. As evidenced by Topsfield Open Space committee surveys we know that Topsfielders highly value recreational paths. In 2005 the Selectmen created a Rail Trail Committee with the mission to convert the abandoned rail bed into a recreational path without the use of Town funds. Topsfield supported this at town meeting and at the polls in 2008.

Our volunteers went about raising funds mostly through grants and donations from organizations such as ECTA. The ECTA funds were used to re-deck the railroad bridge over the Ipswich River. The labor was contributed by volunteers from Topsfield and your own Alex Van Alen. With the bridge now passable we see lots of walkers and bikers enjoying the views. During the recent rains and flooding it was a popular spot in which to view the river. As the TLC encourages all forms of non-motorized activities, your small and large four-footed friends are most welcome as long as they pick up after themselves.

As this article is being written, a non-profit organization, the Iron Horse Preservation Society, is starting to remove all the remaining rails and ties along our trail at no cost to Topsfield. Without the passion and generosity of volunteers the TLC might remain just a dream.



Topsfield Rail Trail Committee Members. For more information on the TLC, visit www.topsfieldtrail.org

ECTA Trail Maps Available Now at These Stores

ECTA Trail Maps are now available at stores throughout our area. Maps include:

Ipswich
Hamilton/Wenham
West Newbury
Topsfield

We will soon have a map available that includes Bradley Palmer, Willowdale, Appleton Farms and New England Biolabs Trails. If you are interested in purchasing a map, please visit one of these stores that help support our trail system.

Ipswich
Coastal Green Grocer
Ipswich Cycle
Hamilton
Green Meadows Farm
Wenham
Wenham Sports Stop
West Newbury
GAR Library
West Newbury Food Mart
Beverly
New England Running Co.
Pinnacle Bikes

Topsfield
Gil's Grocery
Bicycle Shop of Topsfield

Mud Season Reminder

During the mud season, please respect the signs when trails are closed. Riders, stay off trails until they are dry. Most trails open around the 1st of May depending on trail conditions.



New England Biolabs

by Pamela Mansfield-Loomis,
Newsletter Editor

Eighteen years ago, when I was first introduced to the trail network in Ipswich, my early ventures through the woodland trails and estate properties opened to horseback riders were magical. We could ride all the way from what was then Grasmere Farm (now Maplecroft Farm) across Route 133 through Don Bosco (now New England Biolabs property), across Route 1A to Appleton Farm, and ride down Goodhue Street to get to Bradley Palmer via the Groton House trails, or via beautiful side trips through Waldingfield. Word had it you could even ride through Willowdale Forest and eventually connect to Georgetown - imagine the miles of trails that lay ahead! And they still do.

Today, the Biolabs trails off of Fellows Road remain a pleasant short ride for me and my now 30-year-old horse, with a loop that can take about 30 minutes on horseback. I also cross country ski or walk back there with my husband on these familiar trails.

Before 1995, when it was home to the Don Bosco Catholic seminary and retreat house, the grand brick mansion, Mostly Hall, stood a bit remote from the ponds and trails and woody lands that lay beyond, and its wide expanse of lawn was a natural spot for company picnics. A crumbling concrete and brick bridge that is off limits today was a picturesque setting for photos of co-workers who came to enjoy a summer afternoon hosted on the grounds.

But it was through horseback riding that I learned the peaceful network of trails, with many opportunities to observe wildlife - including the works of a very active beaver population. Around 1992, my friend Marianne Lynch and I joined ECTA and ventured out on our first trail rides together, learning the way from the trail opening on Fellows Road down a long straight path by a field, to a marshy area. Turning left, we rode



Barowy Trail, part of New England Biolabs and Essex County Greenbelt, from horseback

past old washing machines and other refuse (now gone) that put our horses on alert. Ahead loomed a narrow wooden bridge with railings that nearly touched our stirrups as we crossed the sturdy structure just a few feet above the water. Our horses were very brave, even though the occasional duck swam quickly for cover into the tall reeds and startled us. We laughingly said we were crossing "The River Stix" for the slightly spooky feeling it gave us. We passed the beaver dam and could go left to Sagamore Road to the Sears trail, or turn right and follow another single file trail behind some houses and out to a huge field which we skirted around to reach the driveway and cross 1A to Appleton Farm's long tree-lined driveway.

When New England Biolabs purchased the 120-acre or so property, ECTA past president, Don Curiale, approached the company president, Don Combs, to ask for permission to continue using and maintaining the trails, just as he had asked the priests years before at Don Boscoe. The tradition of trail access for the past 100 years could continue. Myopia Hunt had ridden through there for all that time, although it must have

always been single file! "We have a wonderful relationship with Biolabs," Don said, noting that ECTA has constantly maintained the trails and bridges, and has worked with neighboring homeowners to keep access possible through trails close to their homes. One Fellows Road neighbor, Kathy Chadwick, allowed an alternate trail to be made through her property when the original trail was closed.

Noticeable changes have been made. The field was opened to soccer games - today picnic benches provide a resting spot for spectators. A parking area was added for cars, but trailers could continue to be parked along the driveway. A water treatment plant - a greenhouse - was built to biofiltrate the sewage. However, the landscape retains its serenity, and the driveway and buildings are fairly invisible from the trails.

Once home to a leather merchant and his family, Mostly Hall has been restored. In addition to modern buildings and forward-thinking changes for a property so rich in history, Combs installed several whimsical sculptures that delight visitors and yes, scare some of the horses (but not mine). A

Continued on page 6

Sled Dog Races at Myopia Draw 60 Teams, 2000 Fans

by Deborah Hamilton, ECTA Board Member

Who knew that my nine years of mushing a team of Siberian Huskies back in the 1970s would become an asset to ECTA in 2010? When we first learned of the possibility of holding the first sled dog race in Hamilton since 1959, I was eager to become involved. I confess, I was skeptical but held my tongue. I remember what it takes to put on a successful race—the ideal combination of snow, cold, lots of volunteers and dog teams, and it hardly seemed like it could all come together as far south as Hamilton. But it did—albeit a shorter, truncated version of the race than the course designers laid out, and concluding at dusk on Saturday evening instead of Sunday.

One-dog juniors raced out and back, followed by one- and two-dog skijourers, departing from the Myopia Schooling field through the Donovan property and on up to Cutler Road, one lane of which had been carefully covered with snow. Teams then turned into Appleton Farms and looped their way through the woods to the monument and back, the larger 6-8 dog teams adding additional miles. At least 40 volunteers manned radios and check points along the way, reporting on progress and problems as the day went on. From my vantage point on Cutler Road we helped several teams that turned down the wrong driveway or ran on the pavement instead of the snow, but aside from one runaway team, there were no mishaps to speak of.

Sunshine and warm temperatures kept the open fields from being used at all, but the portions through the woods held up well throughout the day, and the unlimited teams were reduced to a maximum of 8 dogs running on the shorter, safer, snowier 6 mile course.

One striking aspect of the races to me was the small number of dogs from the traditional “northern” breeds still competing.



Siberian Huskies, Samoyeds, and Malamutes have given over to a longer, leggier, more hound-like hybrid, so the fastest teams more closely resembled Foxhounds than Huskies! But the pickup trucks with wooden dog boxes mounted on the back were still familiar, as were the lightweight ash sleds with p-tex runners used by most of the drivers. There were a couple of high-tech “polycarbonate” sleds too, without a piece of wood on them and weighing in at ounces instead of pounds, but the harnesses, ganglines, drop chains, excited yelping and bundled family members were unchanged from 30 years ago.

The Norman Vaughn Trophy, named in honor of local Arctic explorer and adventurer, and uncle of Myopia’s Master of the Hunt, Don Little, was won by Eddie Clifford who had been a child driver back when I competed and clocked in the two fastest times of the day with two different 8 dog teams. Other long time dog driving friends acted as chief judge and trail help for this, the first race of the season for the New England Sled Dog Club.

Participants and spectators enjoyed seeing the trails used for an exciting non-equine event on a sparkling winter day. Plans are underway for next year’s Myopia Sled Dog Races, date and location to be announced.



Don’t miss out - keep up to date with ECTA happenings and give us your feedback. Become a fan of ECTA on Facebook. The latest updates will automatically appear on your Facebook page. Visit our website at www.ectaonline.org and click on the Facebook icon at the bottom of the page to connect.

ECTA to Help Improve West Newbury Trails in 2010

by Deborah Hamilton, ECTA Board Member and WN Trail Steward

As the “outlying” ECTA member town, West Newbury is not contiguous to trails in other ECTA towns and is separated by the Merrimack River from towns and trails to the north. But the plentiful protected open space we enjoy is criss-crossed by trails, from the river to the Byfield line. Town, State and Greenbelt parcels are linked by trail networks that only rarely have to cross or follow roads. Townspeople play an active role in the care and maintenance of many trails, cleaning up, cutting brush, mowing, trimming branches and removing fallen trees. Members of the Con.Com, Mill Pond Committee, Open Space Committee, Park and Rec., the West Newbury Riding and Driving Club and Myopia Hunt Club

all contribute time and talent to trail maintenance, year round, as do private citizens who just happen to abut public lands or enjoy using the trails.

Last Fall, Alex Van Alen and I were joined by Jay Smith, WN Conservation Agent, and Gary Bill of the DPW to discuss using ECTA funds, talent and expertise in upgrading the riverside trail that extends from the Coffin Street end of River Road to the steep hill at the end of Way to the River Road. Presently, parking is only available at those junctions, effectively prohibiting access to the Riverbend Conservation Area to anyone wishing to launch a kayak, push a stroller or unable to walk on sloping, uneven ground. The Town will eventually have to upgrade the roadway at one end to accommodate parking for a few cars at river level. But eroded slopes and the low areas along the trail that flood at spring high tides are difficult to cross on foot-- if not impassable--

currently. The lovely 10 year old wooden bridge across the Indian River where it empties into the Merrimack also needs some attention as the embankments next to the bridge bases have deteriorated and we need fill to bring them up to the level of the walks. Upland trails also will need ongoing maintenance and improvement, and with the new ECTA-prepared West Newbury Trail Management Plan adopted by the town, that work can be completed to ECTA standards without additional filings with the Con Com for each wetland crossing. Jeremy Baker of Boy Scout Troop 26 is earning his Eagle Scout rating by marking those trails with colored wooden markers this spring.

The ECTA Board of Directors voted to contribute funds toward material, manpower and a Bobcat for improving that section of trail along the river. Alex is endeavoring to find grant money to augment the ECTA contribution. As fortunate as we

Continued next page

Storm Damage at Appleton Farms



Wayne Castonguay, Manager of Appleton Farms, reported on conditions after the violent wind storm: “We had about 200 trees down. Most of the damage was to conifers in general and our white pine plantations in particular. Most of our fences were damaged, one vehicle was crushed by a falling tree and some roofs were damaged. Our meteorological tower recorded sustained winds over 70 MPH for over an hour with a peak wind gust of 88 MPH! We’ll be cleaning up for months.”

New England Biolabs

continued from page 4

skeletal statue of a horse following beside an equally skeletal man scared some horses so frequently that ECTA posted signs on the trail to warn riders. Only the horse remains now - the walking man has disappeared. In the pond, a sculpture of a man with a long pole appears to walk through the reeds. A metal rhinoceros charges out of the woods.

On the outskirts of Biolabs, the open space along Route 1A is a 20-acre parcel that Biolabs purchased from a lifelong worker at Appleton Farm, John Barowy. 17 acres were given to Greenbelt, and the remaining three provide an envelope in the event the company expands. The Barowy trail undulates and winds around hills, through a vast and picture perfect landscape - a suitable subject for a painting - and down to the Miles River, crossed via a concrete bridge that is inviting enough for horses to go two abreast. The trail opening through a granite wall leads to a small grassy area alongside 1A. ECTA arranged a special crosswalk for horses, complete with signs and painted yellow lines, because riders cross over into Appleton Farm's main driveway and continue to the amazing trail system beyond.



Concrete bridge crosses the Miles River on the connecting Barowy Trail that leads to Biolabs trails.



Cross country skiing is a popular way to enjoy the Biolabs trails, which are mostly flat.

West Newbury Trails

Continued from previous page

are in West Newbury to have open access to so many beautiful public areas, the partnership with ECTA has paid great benefits to the Town already with the mapping, planning, advocacy and expertise that ECTA provides.

Get Involved with ECTA

Let us know if you can help with events, projects, and trail cleanup days. Contact us anytime!

Join the ECTA Young Friends Committee

Are you a trail lover with a desire to help keep ECTA effective in keeping our trails open? If you feel you have something to give, whether it is time to volunteer at an event, new ideas, a specific skill to help with marketing or technology, or you may want to lead a trail walk, the ECTA Young Friends Committee is for you. The YFC meets casually every month or two. We are currently looking for extra help during National Trails Day on June 5 at Bradley Palmer State Park. If you are interested, please call Landi Van Alen at 978-312-1778.

YFC Members

Ashley Hill
Katy Emmott
Heidi Zenger
Landi Van Alen
Nelly Coues
Leigh Mantoni-Stewart
Eleanor Van Alen
Ellie Doerr

The Essex County Trail Association is dedicated to the preservation and maintenance of open trails in our local communities for the purpose of passive recreation and the benefit of the environment. The ECTA works to build coalitions with national and local associations, to serve as liaison between membership and landowners, and to encourage responsible trail use.



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